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Testimony of Christen Rose Vogel, MD
of the Primary Care Center at Connecticut Children's Medical Center
IN SUPPORT OF SB 209,
AN ACT CONCERNING FUNDING FOR THE REACH OUT AND READ PROGRAM
Before the Connecticut General Assembly's Committee on Children
February 5, 2015

As a pediatric resident in Hartford, Connecticut and a life-long Connecticut resident, I am writing you today in strong support of for SB 209.

There is a reason why we have all heard the saying that "children are our future" – because it is the truth and the current statistics are frightening. The time I spend during each well child visit reviewing the importance of reading is always a surprise to the parents, and the children's genuine excitement about getting a new book is always a surprise to me. I was fortunate to have grown up in a home full of books with well educated parents, so I can understand if you are having difficulty imagining the life of the population most affected by Reach Out and Read, so please allow me paint a picture for you. The average child seen Connecticut Children's Medical Center Primary Care Clinic comes from a single family home with a young mother that did not finish high school and is often unable to read or correctly fill out the forms that will guide their child's physical and mental health provided that day. These children are being set up for failure and they deserve every bit of help we can provide them.

Lest you think this is only based on my personal experience, let me assure you hundreds of studies have demonstrated the benefits of Reach Out and Read. In the largest study to date of this program, in a national sample of parents of children age 6–72 months, implementation of ROR programs was associated with increased reading time at home and increased language development and performance.

In addition, The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a policy statement in 2014 stating that "Reading regularly with young children stimulates optimal patterns of brain development and strengthens parent-child relationships at a critical time in child development, which, in turn, builds language, literacy, and social-emotional skills that last a lifetime."

If it is not enough to support Reach Out and Read because it addresses the widening achievement gap in the United States, support it because children growing up in poverty face gaps in every other aspect of their lives, including an equally pervasive and related health gap. This gap appears early in life and builds over a lifetime. Please help the children of Hartford lessen all of these gaps by allowing Reach Out and Read to continue.

Sincerely,
Christen Rose Vogel, MD